Bar Chords

Bar chords, also known as barre chords, are any chord that requires at least one finger to press down multiple strings simultaneously (at the same time). Bar chords allow guitarists to play chords that are not restricted to the open strings. Bar chords are known as movable chords as each form can be moved up and down the neck in a linear fashion. That is, one bar chord formation will allow the guitar player to play a chord in any key by merely moving it up or down the neck. Bar chords can be used in conjunction with open chords or with other bar chords. Bar chords are sometimes necessary when a song requires a chord to be played that cannot otherwise be played open. Any chord played in the open position can be replicated as a bar chord further up the neck, given of course that the guitarist has built the strength and dexterity to do so.

"So hold on Erich! You are saying that ***anything*** I play in the open position can be played further up the neck in bar chord fashion to produce the same chord in every other key?" Yes! That one concept alone will open your playing up quite a bit. That means that many of those open chords that you know already are going to become our patterns or "templates" for the first set of bar chords that you should learn.

As you probably know already from watching my instructional videos on my YouTube channels, many of my lessons are based around open chords and the use of a capo. I try to keep things as simple as possible when teaching. My philosophy is, "there's no need in complicating something that's not complicated". There are plenty of intricate guitar parts that cannot be simplified. In those cases there is no way around it. Sometimes however, even the simplest of songs call for bar chords and there's no way around that, either. The capo can be used to limit bar chords or change the forms of the open chords that you would use, but sometimes you just have to play a bar chord. In those cases wouldn't it be nice to have that ability?

Some guitar players might skip this section fearing the dreaded bar chords. While others may feel that their playing does not lack without bar chords. But that's not you! You are wanting to excel as a guitarist and I am going to help you! That being said, bar chords are challenging for guitarists who have never played them. Remember you ***and your hands*** are learning a new concept! Please be patient with yourself during this process and understand that everyone from Jimi Hendrix to Steve Vai had difficulty with bar chords in the beginning. I have taught hundreds of students over several decades and have never met a student, even my best, who got this concept immediately. So be encouraged, take your time, watch the videos and enjoy the process. There are literally thousands of bar chords, but here we will only be using the ones that you will use the most. The more you practice them, the faster and better you will become.

I like to break the subject of bar chords down into two sections:

1. **Understanding the forms**
2. **Playing the chords**

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Understanding the Forms

Check out the attached pages with the bar chord diagrams. You will notice that I have separated these as sixth string roots and fifth string roots. That means that the root, or letter name of the chord is located on either the sixth or fifth string. For this first example see the sixth string bar chords page. Now locate the first major chord. Does anything look familiar about that form? That form comes from our open E major or E chord. Now look at the minor chord form that is two chord forms to the right. Now play an E minor chord. Do you see the similarity? If not, hang with me! Now go to the bar chords page with the fifth string roots. Look at the third chord. This chord form comes from the A minor(A-) chord. Are you seeing the pattern? If not, check my videos on bar chords at:

- YouTube - YGSGuitarLessons - Bar Chords 1
- YouTube - YGSGuitarLessons - Bar Chords 2

Notice the red circle that is in each bar chord. That circle represents the root of the chord. The root is essentially the one note that the rest of the chord is built upon. It is also the letter name of the chord. For instance, A major, A minor, A7 and A-7 all have "A" as the root or letter name. The rest of the notes in the chord determine it's "flavor", as in: major, minor, 7, -7 etc. So that means every time you move that bar chord the letter name of the chord changes also. Each of the bar chords on the bottom row of the fifth string roots page have the red circle located at the second fret of the fifth string which is a "B". Therefore every chord in that bottom row has a "B" root. The "flavor" of the chord is located above the form. Therefore, if you moved each one of those chords up a half-step, you would then have a "C" in the root. Get it? I knew you would!
Now that you understand where the forms come from and how they move about the fret board, let's talk about how to play them.

Playing the Chords

Understanding how the chords move about the fretboard and actually playing the chords are two totally different things. When playing bar chords, lazy or poor technique will quickly limit you. There are a lot of other techniques - like playing single notes - that guitarists can "fudge", even with poor technique. Not so much with bar chords... so trust me through this process. Watch the associated videos and keep practicing until you get this. No one gets this right off the bat; it is a learned technique that the more you do, the better you become. Now that we have that excuse out of the way, ***let's do this thing!***

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As someone new to playing bar chords, the following points are of utmost importance! If you find yourself having difficulty, make sure you are aware of the following:

1. The finger that does the barring, MUST either be perfectly straight, or better yet hyper-extended. Here is a great exercise: Lift your fretting hand up and view your index finger from the side. While viewing it from the side, straighten the finger. Now go beyond that and see if you can't slightly bend the finger backwards. Obviously, our knuckles don't allow us to bend the finger back too far, but just that little bit is what we call hyper-extended. In this hyper-extended position, your finger is ideally situated for evenly distributing the weight of that finger across all the strings in your bar chord. Even if your finger is perfectly straight, this is a great place to start. I usually tell my students to hyper-extend that finger a little bit because I know the natural tendency is to bend it the other way - which is awesome if you want your bar chords to sound like poo! If the barring finger is flexed or bent in its natural direction - even the slightest bit - during the bar chord, you most likely will have some unwanted muted notes.
2. In order to have that straight or hyper-extended barring finger, we need to make sure that our thumb is on the back of the neck closer towards the bottom part and not lazily hanging over the top of the neck. That may be fine for lead work and open chords from time to time, but it's the kiss of death when playing bar chords. ***So don't do it!***
3. Keeping your thumb on the back of the neck should allow for some space between the palm of your hand and bottom of the guitar neck. Again, at least in the beginning, you want to make sure that space is there, otherwise you will have difficulty with your bar chords.
4. For the fingers that are not barring, but are playing individual notes, make sure that those fingers are playing directly on the fingertips and not on the pads. ***This is extremely important!*** I emphasize this a bunch in eBook one and I am not done preaching about it. Seriously, for my students that are playing sloppy bar chords or claim that they can't play them at all, they are always breaking one of these rules... or several. "So listen to me now and believe me later". For those other fingers remember, "Fingertips! Fingertips! Fingertips!" For now, the trick will be to bar your barring finger properly, while properly playing on the fingertips of all the other fingers. If you don't give up and practice, ***YOU WILL GET IT!!***

Practice, practice, practice!! You've heard me say it and you'll keep hearing me say it! You are only as good as how long and how well you are practicing! No one is a "natural" at this; anyone who desires this skill ***must*** practice it.

This kind of direction is difficult to put into words. You've heard it said before that a picture can say 1000 words. Well a video can say about 10,000 words! Please watch the associated videos after reading this as they will clear so much up for you.

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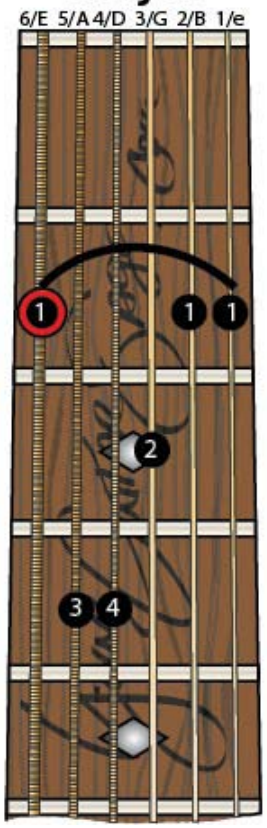
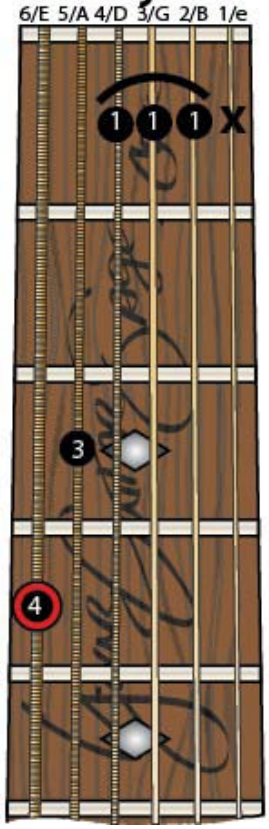
6th String Root Bar Chord Forms

**click the chord stamp to hear Erich play the chord for you*

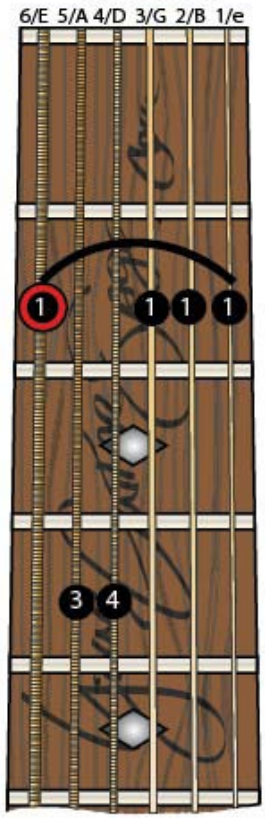
Major



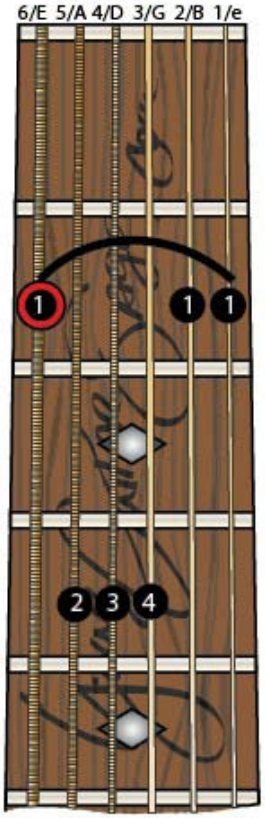
Major



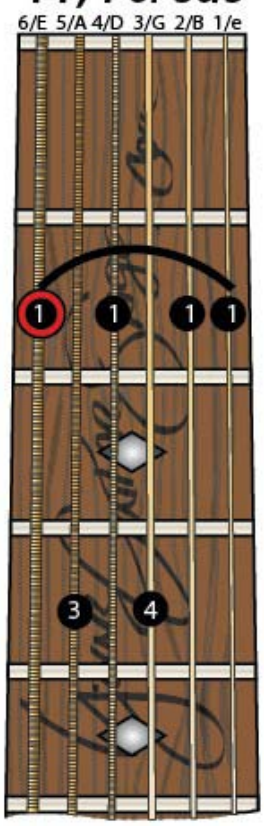
- or Min



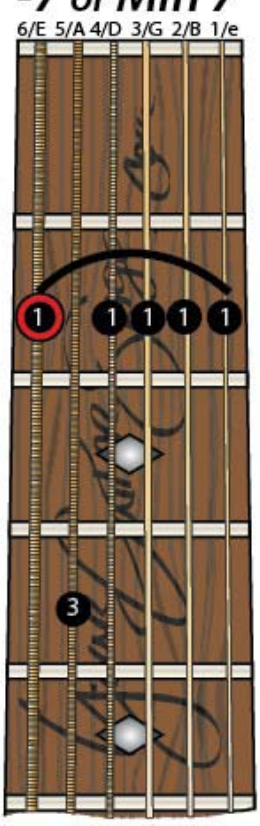
Sus or 4



11,4 or sus



-7 or Min 7



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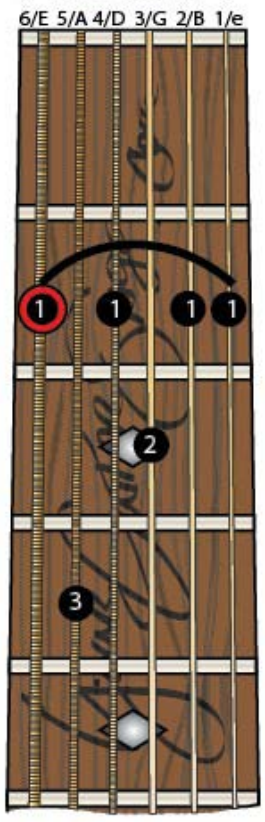
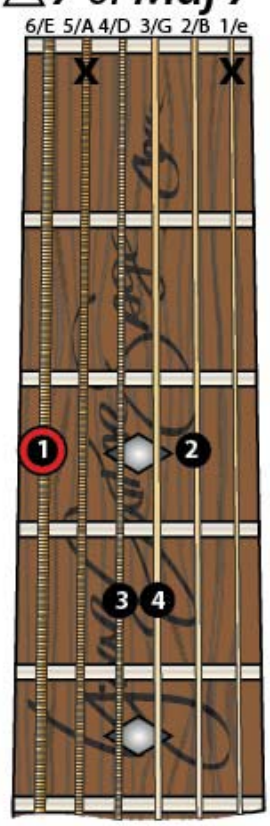


△7 or Maj 7



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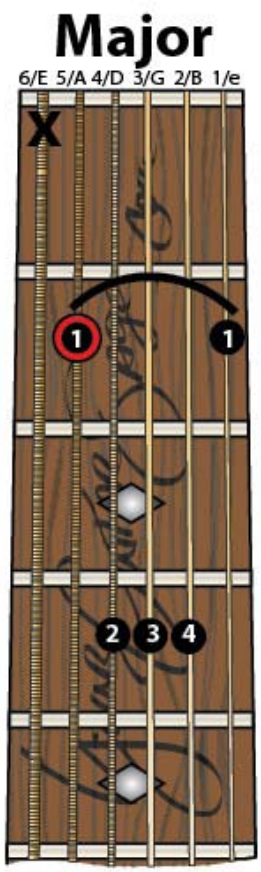
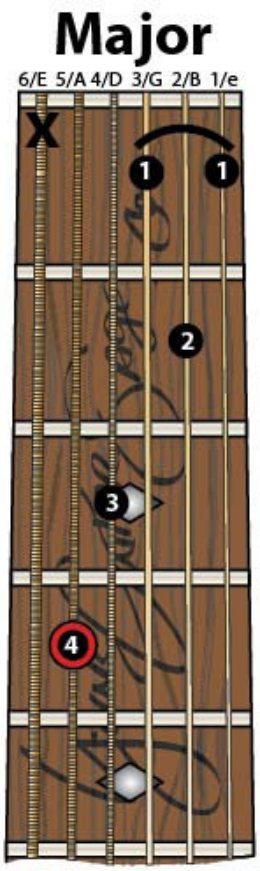
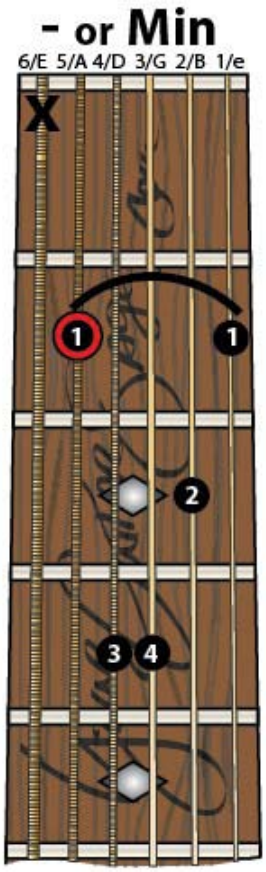
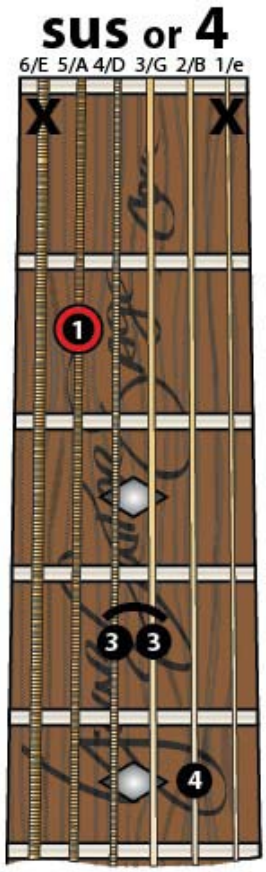
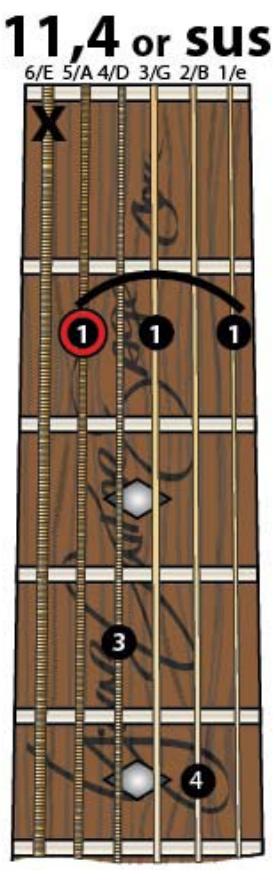
5th String Root Bar Chord Forms

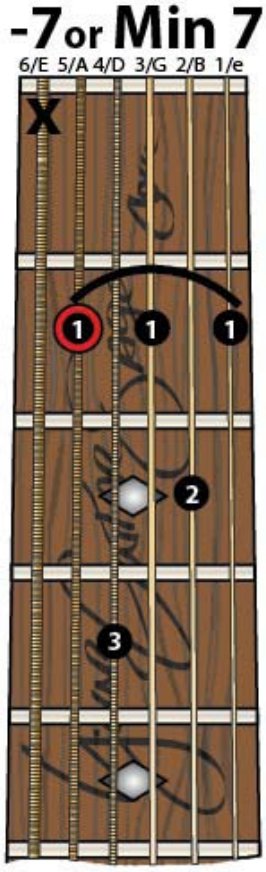


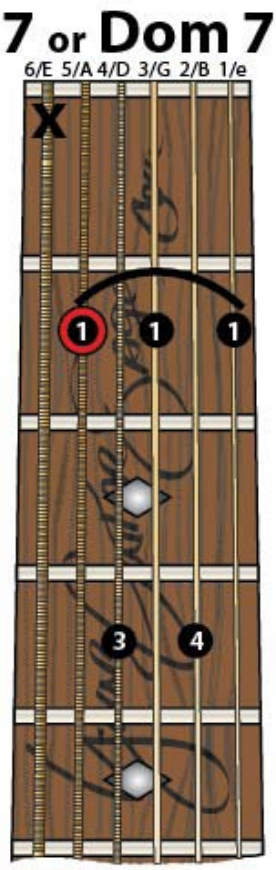


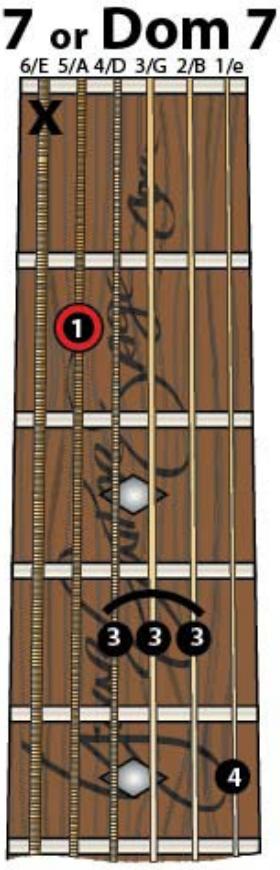












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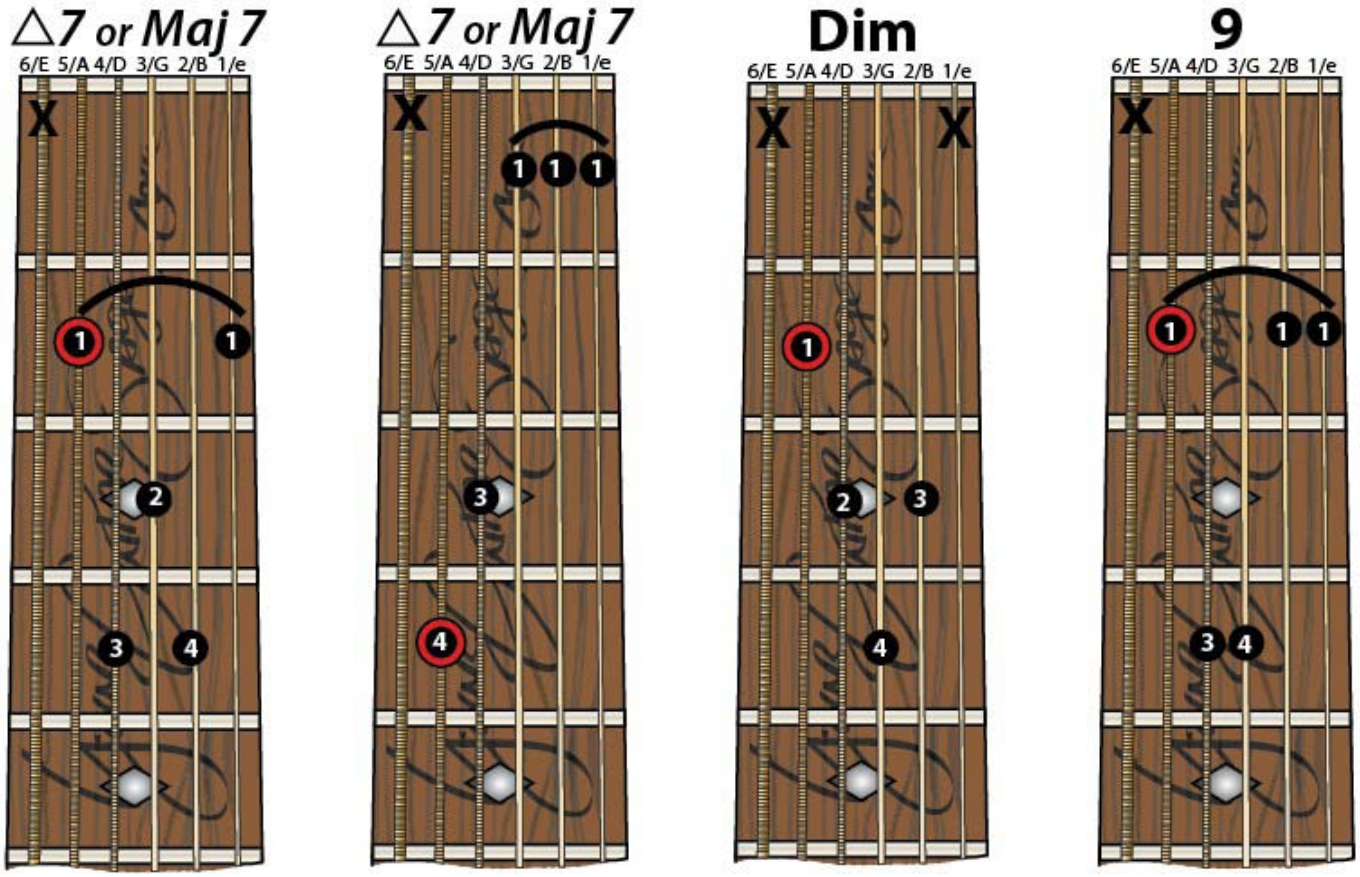
5th String Root Bar Chord Forms



For some extra special "chord-construction goodness", check out the Chords Woodshed on my wesbite, www.yourguitarsage.com!

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